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ABSTRACT

This book attempts to provide cultural information that will enable an American to communicate effectively with people in Thailand. The book discusses differences between American and Thai culture in such areas as food, laws, customs, religion, language, dress, and basic attitudes. Background information is given on Thailand and the characteristics of the Thai people. Problems in intercultural communication are presented via situations built around such themes as nationalism, the family, fate, and saving face. Facial expressions and gestures are also discussed. "Survival" phrases in Thai and translations of common signs are given. A brief bibliography completes the volume. (CFM)

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BUILDING BRIDGES OF UNDERSTANDING



A Brigham Young University LANGUAGE & INTERCULTURAL RESEARCH CENTER Communication Learning Aid

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We appreciate and acknowledge the comments and contributions of various individuals and organizations in the preparation of this publication.

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Introduction

It has been said that in some ways you are like all other people, like some other people, and like no other person. Like you, for example, most Thai people would cry at a funeral, laugh at a good joke, and become irritated if bothered while trying to sleep. Love, anger, or fear are found to some degree in all humans. Desires to be accepted and to have peace of mind are also universal. However, different people possess different attitudes and values and have distinct patterns of behavior.

This Learning Aid can help you to communicate better with people who are like you in some ways and not like you in other ways. These ways are not necessarily right or wrong, better or worse; they may be just different, unfamiliar, and perhaps even offensive. This publication discusses some differences in such things as food, laws, customs, religion, language, dress, and basic attitudes which will be encountered in Thailand.

People perceive their relationships to those around them by thousands of subtle signs. Something as simple as knowing when and where to walk or sit is a "cultural cue." The loss of familiar cues when entering a new environment may produce strain and frustration. This cultural disorientation is commonly called "culture

shock." As one learns to communicate, judiciously using the new cultural cues, the severity and amount of frustration and disorientation are reduced.

This Learning Aid will provide tools to help you recognize the situations that may cause this confusion. It will help you to develop skills which, if successfully applied, will enable you to communicate more effectively with the Thai people and make your association with them pleasant and meaningful.

The broad generalizations made will hold true at most times and with most Thai people. However, just as your attitudes, feelings and reactions vary in many ways from the way another American might think or feel in a given circumstance, some individual differences will also be evident in the Thai culture.

The basic emphasis of this booklet is to prepare you for actual experience interacting and communicating with the people of Thailand in their environment and culture. Of course, you will enjoy and learn much from this Aid even if your opportunity for a "first hand" experience is limited. Learning about another country may be by *study, instruction, or experience.*

Land of the free

Since 1941 the ancient Kingdom of Siam has been known as Thailand, which means "Land of the Free."

Thailand is slightly larger than the state of Texas, almost 200,000 square miles in size. Laos and Cambodia lie to the east, Malaysia to the south, and Burma to the west and northwest. The Gulf of Thailand, which connects with the South China Sea, also touches the coast of southern Thailand.

Thailand is divided into four main geographical regions. Northern Thailand is built upon a series of mountain ridges broken by rivers. The north's irrigated valley land produces a large portion of Thailand's food supply.

Central Thailand is a great fertile river basin where the mountain tributaries join to form the Chao Phraya River. Because of the rich soil, rice, fruits, and vegetables thrive.

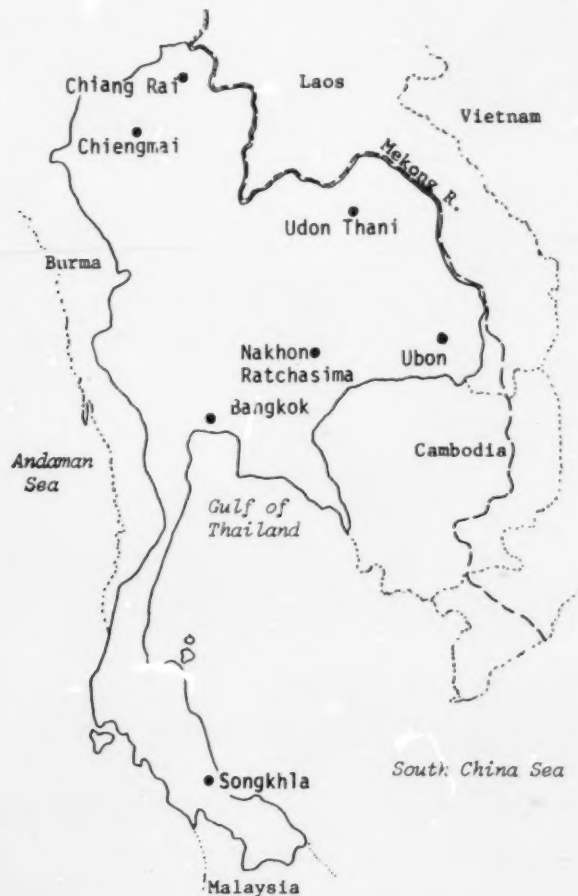
Nearly half of Thailand's population lives in this central region.

Northeastern Thailand is often referred to as the Korat Plateau. Here the soil is sandy, and the land is used primarily for growing rice and raising cattle.

Southern Thailand is a mountainous ridge on the Malay Peninsula. It is heavily forested and supports Thailand's large rubber plantations. This area is also abundant in natural resources and is the center of the country's mining activities.

The capitol of Thailand is Bangkok--"City of Angels." Its population is over four million.

From February to June is the hot season. The rainy season follows, from June to November. The cool, dry season is from November to February, with temperatures averaging in the low eighties.



The Thais call it home

When you are introduced to someone, the first question you may ask is, "Where do you live?" The next question might be, "Where is that?" If you are further interested, "What is it like there?" is likely to follow. Asking these questions is an attempt to find similarities or to learn something new. Such conversation may be a stepping stone for increasing understanding.

Before you can best understand and communicate with the people of Thailand, you need to know what is important to them, their customs and attitudes, their personal lifestyle, and the national characteristics which influence their actions and values. Few things are more meaningful to a person than "home." Becoming familiar with the following facts about Thailand will help to orient you and remove some "fear of the unknown." It will also help you to begin to understand what is important to the Thai people. This, in turn, will become a basis for effective communication with them.

History

The ancestors of the Thai people lived in what is now China's Yunnan Province and began migrating to the region about a thousand years ago. They established a kingdom at Sukhotai in the 1200s.

In 1350, the Thai capital was moved to Ayutthaya on the Chao Phraya River north of present-day Bangkok.

By this time the Thai people had created a strong kingdom and were increasingly influenced by Indian settlers who brought their culture, including Buddhism, to Thailand. The Thai became devout followers of Buddha and combined the New Indian and old Chinese traditions into a fusion that is uniquely Thai.

In 1782 the Chakri dynasty was established, with its capital at Bangkok. That dynasty has continued to reign to the present time. Modernization began under the enlightened rule of King Mongkut and his son Chulalongkorn. Western specialists, particularly from Denmark and other small European nations which posed no imperial threat, were brought in. They established a postal service, mapped the most important regions of the country, built roads and railways, and introduced Western legal concepts and administrative methods. The first modern schools began to provide an alternative to the traditional education by monks in Buddhist temples.

A group of Westernized Thai intellectuals forced the king to accept constitutional limitations on his powers in a bloodless revolution in 1932.

During World War II Japan, Thailand's ally,

helped the Thais annex territory which France had earlier claimed as part of Cambodia and Burma.



Subsidized by the United States, Thailand sent 11,000 troops to fight in Vietnam from 1968 to 1972. The United States built seven air bases in Thailand.

In a bloodless coup on November 17, 1971, a revolutionary council of military and civilian leaders assumed all government powers.

In October 1973, college students demanding a new democratic constitution led mobs that overthrew the military junta. A democratic constitution was adopted in 1974.

When Kukrit Pramoj became premier in 1975, he immediately called on the United States to withdraw its 25,000 military personnel from Thailand within a year. The U.S. withdrew its B-29 bombers and agreed to remove all American military personnel by March 1976. The current premier is Thanin Kraiwichian.

When Communists took over neighboring Cambodia and Laos in 1975, thousands of refugees fled to Thailand. They were settled in makeshift camps along the borders.

Government

The constitutional monarchy is headed by a prime minister. Legislative functions are conducted by a senate of 100 members, who are appointed by the king, and a house of representatives, whose 269 members are elected by the people.

The king, Phumiphon Adunyadet, descends from the first king of the Chakri Dynasty, which established the capital in Bangkok in 1782. The power of the king has diminished since the revolution in 1932 which established a constitutional monarchy.

The Thai people have a very long tradition

of rule by monarchs and they still hold a very deep respect toward the king, the queen, and the royal family. One should never say or do anything which reflects negatively on them. In addition there will be occasions when it would be a courteous gesture for a visitor to pay respect to the king and queen. For example, one should stand when the "Royal Anthem" is played at the beginning or end of a theatrical performance.

Economy

About 80 percent of the Thai population is engaged in some form of agricultural production. The bounty of nature in the moist tropics of Southeast Asia has for centuries allowed the Thais to live in relative peace and plenty. But particularly on the huge, fertile, largely alluvial Bangkok Plain the soil is being exhausted and there is no longer any readily available new land for cultivators to exploit.

The economy of Thailand following World War II has prospered. Primary credit is due to Thai agricultural exports. Rice is the main source of export earnings.

Linking the Bangkok region with the northeast is the "Friendship Highway," built with United States aid. Along this road new fields are being cultivated. This is one reason that Thailand has been able to expand corn production. Thailand's fruit production is also increasing yearly. Her biggest fruit crops include pineapples, mangos, bananas, and mangosteens (a red-brown fruit with a flavor suggestive of both peaches and pineapples).

Thailand's forestry industry is growing rapidly. The chief export item from this industry is teak wood.

In addition to rice and teak, Thai tin and rubber are also valuable exports in the foreign exchange market. Thailand's fishing industry ranks next to agriculture in importance. Thailand also abounds in minerals of all kinds, including tin, gold, copper, silver, and lead.



Within recent years, the Thai government has launched the manufacturing of many items such as paper, textiles, and plastics. Consumer goods, machine equipment, petroleum fuels, and other materials regularly increase in demand.

An increasing number of young Thais are migrating to Bangkok in search of jobs. Rising expectations—which developed in the wake of transistor radios and motorcycles—are spurring the discontent.

Education

Anciently, education was the responsibility of Buddhist monks, who even today continue the education of priests in private schools.

Government schools were established in Thailand in the 19th century, and consequently the literacy rate is quite high. After one to three years of kindergarten, children are required to complete seven years of school. But insufficient facilities make this difficult for all to achieve.

Tuition for the five-year government and private secondary schools is paid by the student or his family. Universities are all government-operated. Entrance is by examination, and there is stiff competition for the limited number of vacancies.

Religion

Most of the people (94%) claim Buddhist affiliation. The rest are mostly Moslem, with some Confucians and Christians.

To the devout Thai, religion is the very basis of his lifestyle. Saffron-robed Buddhist monks are seen everywhere, and each community has an ornamental Buddhist monastery, called a *wat*. The *wat* contains a temple, a convocation hall, one or more pagodas, living quarters for the monks and novices, and a sacred *Bho* tree, which legend says sheltered Buddha at the time of his "enlightenment." The *wat* also serves as a hospital, sports ground, club, and lodging place for traveling Thais.

Every Thai male is expected to serve as a Buddhist monk for three months, living only upon the alms received from the people.

Language

Thai is the national language. It is taught in all the schools and is used on radio and television.

The calligraphic system used in China and Japan is not used in Thailand. A phonetic, alphabetic writing system has been used for nine hundred years.



The people

The people of Thailand are a blend of the Asian personality. They are independent and individualistic like the Chinese, yet contain much of the genuine involvement of the Filipino. The Thai woman blends the financial dominating authority of the household of the Vietnamese woman with the service and humility of the Japanese wife. There is an air of complacency and solitude akin to the Indonesians, yet Thais are politically astute, being known as the greatest "fence sitters" in history. The Thai are a smiling, happy, free-spirited people.

They originally migrated into Southeast Asia from the Yangtze River valley of China in about the 13th century. They intermarried with the people already occupying the area.

Many Chinese have migrated to Thailand in the last century and some have intermarried with the Thais. The Thai people generally do not like to be referred to as part of the Chinese race, even though they have their roots in China. They are proud of their individual identity.

Most Thais live in villages bound with close clan and family ties. Trade and craftsmanship are in the hands of the Thais, but large scale trading and marketing are handled exclusively by the Chinese. The Chinese communities are concentrated in centers of trade and industry, especially in the capital, Bangkok, where they dominate the business world.

Thailand's next largest minority community is the Malays. Thai-speaking Moslems, the Malays are mainly farmers and fishermen and are most heavily concentrated in the southern provinces bordering Malaysia.

Many urban families hire girls to do the cooking and washing, and often to care for the children and do the marketing.

About one-third of the Thai women work. In addition to assisting with farm work, they may work in the schools or for the government.

The elderly live in the home of one of their children, where they are treated with great respect. They may help care for the younger children, but generally do few household chores.

Dating & marriage

Until recently, dating was discouraged until girls finished secondary school, and then it was allowed only in the company of a brother or another friend.

However, dating has become quite Westernized and it is more common for boys and girls to go to movies and to other activities in pairs. Boys may come into the home only when the family is present.

Young people usually make their own choice of whom they marry, but parents usually encourage their children to finish their education before marriage. The parents may be brought together to make an "engagement agreement." When the date of the wedding is agreed upon, the parents of the girl ask for a guaranty--a necklace or ring, a sum of money, a house, or land for the building of a house.

The arts

Famous for their ancient theater, dance arts, and shadow plays, the Thais share an active interest in their culture and ancient heritage.

The most beautiful daughters in families are invited to join the traditional Thai dance groups. Hand movements in Thai dances require graceful, flexible fingers than can curve back. The dancers wear very long, decorative fingernails to accentuate this backward curve.

Painting, sculpture, architecture, and dance have always been related to religious service. The painter or sculptor dedicated his life to the service of Buddha, and went through an ordination similar to the ordination of a monk.

The most striking paintings are the murals



done between the seventeenth and early nineteenth centuries on the walls of monasteries. The hot, humid climate and war destruction eliminated nearly everything earlier than the seventeenth century and ruined much of the later examples. The central figure is always Buddha, the mural depicting scenes from his life.



In addition to murals, another type of painting is the long cloth banners which are displayed on special occasions.

Thai sculpture, both that modeled in wax and then cast in bronze, and that carved in stone or

built of stucco, is a far older art in Thailand than painting, and more enduring examples exist from all periods, going back as far as the 6th century. The art of sculpture also consists almost entirely of Buddha images.

The images of Buddha are copied repeatedly. The patron who commissioned an image wanted the traditional symbolism to be apparent, and he hoped that the image would inherit some part of Buddha's power. To assure this he would choose as a model some statue that had already displayed magical qualities, and ask the sculptor to duplicate it exactly.

Buddha images have been produced in all sizes, from tiny miniatures to colossal figures over 20 feet high.

Recreation

Thai people enjoy their leisure time. Movies are popular. Thais enjoy watching television, playing cards, flying kites, and just relaxing in conversation with friends. Thai boxing is rather spectacular, since the use of elbows, knees, fists and feet is permitted. In fact, the only rule in Thai boxing is "no biting." Soccer and basketball are popular spectator sports.

Communicating in Thailand

As you anticipate an experience in a culture different than your own, you no doubt expect certain communication problems. The mistake most of us make is to assume that our problems in communication stem only from language differences and that the problem can be resolved by appropriate language training.

However, verbal communication comprises only a portion of the total communicative process. There is mounting evidence that nonverbal cues, which are often too subtle to even be conscious, communicate far more than words. So, considering communication in a broader sense, the difficulty is not limited to a verbal language barrier. Communication involves ideas, images, and symbolic meaning. Communication problems arise when the life experiences and

cultures of the communicators are not the same.

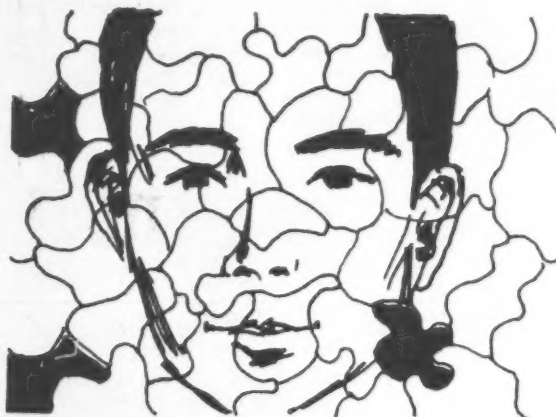
The sections that follow will cover the following important facets of communication:

- * How and why people think and act the way they do
- * The language itself
- * Nonverbal communication
- * Behavioral dos and don'ts
- * Survival signs to read and understand
- * Making daily interaction easier for you and the people of Thailand

A people to get to know

Apart from "places to go and things to see" there are "people to know" in Thailand. Communication goes much deeper than language. Behaviors, ways of thinking, and manners of living also relate to communication.

Individuals in every culture use various devices to disguise their true feelings and attitudes in some situation. The difference between a Thai and an American is that each uses a different system of expressing or disguising his emotions in order to be accepted in his own culture. Furthermore, some emotions are properly shown in one culture which are not acceptable in another. For example, a Thai may show his affection for a member of his own sex by publicly holding hands, but public affection between opposite sexes is not acceptable. In the United States the opposite is true. Members of the same sex never hold hands, and opposite sexes may quite properly express affection in public.



In every culture certain feelings or assumptions influence how the members of that culture act and determine what value they place on certain things and ideas. Descriptions of these feelings and assumptions are here called *themes*.

Themes are a way of discussing a culture by

using examples of behavior and attitudes. For example, Americans seem to believe that it is admirable to do well in business and to become wealthy. This theme is illustrated by the fact that Americans generally put forth much effort to improve their social and economic status and they treat the wealthy and successful with great respect. On the other hand, the Asian cultures seem to believe that the most admirable trait is wisdom, and they respect those who are older and wiser or who are better educated.

Knowing the characteristic assumptions of the culture makes it possible to predict how the members of that culture will act in a situation that involves the theme. For instance, Americans are a time-conscious people. They believe that promptness is very important and that tardiness is an indication of indifference and inefficiency. In Thailand, life moves at a slower pace. So a Thai may be confused by the American who always seems to be in a hurry, who expects others to be on time for appointments, and who apologizes for being a couple of minutes late.

A special exercise is used to illustrate these themes. First, a lifelike situation is presented in which a person like you is in a position that could prove frustrating or embarrassing. Inherent in each situation is an underlying way of thinking or doing (a theme) that is part of the Thai culture. As you read each incident, identify the theme. Try to imagine the other circumstances in which it might occur.

Next, the theme will be discussed as it relates to cultural concerns. Finally, another situation and a variety of possible reactions will be described. Using what you have learned from your study, you are to choose one reaction. The various alternatives are then discussed.

Several significant, general cultural themes found throughout Thailand have been chosen. As you understand and apply these principles of communication, you will adjust to other situations more easily.

THEME I: NATIONALISM & CLASS CONSCIOUSNESS, "WHO'S UNDERDEVELOPED?"

THEME II: THE PATRIARCHAL FAMILY, "WHO'S THE BOSS?"

THEME III: MAY PEN PAY, "IT DOESN'T MATTER."

THEME IV: SAVING FACE, "WHOM CAN YOU TRUST?"

Theme 1

Who's underdeveloped?

At the Tokyo airport, Mr. Singer boarded the Air Siam jet to make the last leg of his flight to Bangkok.

The stewardess who had greeted him as he entered later learned he was visiting Thailand on U.S. government business.

"I've never been to Washington," she told him, "but I saw a television program about it. The buildings are so beautiful and impressive."

"It is a rather impressive place to live and work," Mr. Singer agreed. "But I am surprised to hear how you learned about Washington. I didn't know that Thailand had television."

The reaction of the stewardess surprised him. She made a courteous reply and left, and for the rest of the flight avoided talking to him. Mr. Singer was left wondering what he had said or done to offend her.



Nationalism & class consciousness

The majority of the Thai people are extremely nationalistic. They have traditionally felt that their land and its people, religion, and customs, are unique. They pride themselves in being a free people who have never been colonized or dominated by a Western power. They are also extremely proud of being one of the most progressive and modern countries in Southeast Asia.

Perhaps Mr. Singer expected to find dirt roads, thick jungles, and elephants used for travel. Such stereotypes may be seen in some up-country areas of Thailand. But Thailand--Bangkok especially--is quite Westernized and modernized. By saying that he did not know that Thailand had television, Mr. Singer implied that Thailand was underdeveloped. The stewardess thought he was making fun of her country.

Many of the Thais are afraid that they are losing some of the traditional characteristics of the Thai way of life. Some, especially the older people, resent the so-called Westernization of Thailand. Some younger people, however, enjoy seeing their country progress.

The Thai people are particularly united in their pride in their historical past, their religion, and their political leaders. The growth of Communism in Southeast Asia has jeopardized the peace that they have known for centuries. Be very cautious about making comments about the leaders, religions, or country in general. Refer to them only with the greatest respect.

Although the Thai people are united in their love of their country, its traditional institutions, and its modern progress, they are very class conscious, and every facet of their society points to definite class distinctions.

Most Thai people are either of the upper or lower class, with a minority considered part of a growing middle class. Status may be determined by occupation, living conditions, educational opportunities, and social mobility. It is difficult for the lower class to move into a higher class except through taking advantage of educational opportunities.

The Thais feel that the natural social order is founded on an inequality of status resulting from individual merit. The way to achieve spiritual and material wellbeing is to perform one's prescribed role in a correct manner. However, the Thai traditionally believes that he must stay within his status position only as long as fate does not intervene. There is always hope that some good deed in the past will improve his status. If not, he blames his own past actions and is content with the present. He feels that by performing his role correctly, social order will prevail.

Time to test yourself

Your associate, Mr. Binthong, comes to work very upset. Some family members visit him during the day and they all excitedly discuss what appears to be a serious concern.

When Binthong appears equally upset the next day, you ask what is troubling him so. He tells you his daughter wants to marry a Chinese man and he is trying to prevent the marriage from taking place.

"But why should that concern you?" you ask. "You live near Chinese families, and we have Chinese employees here. Don't many Thais intermarry with the Chinese?"

Binthong says he'd rather not discuss it further. What do you do?

1. Find an opportunity to counsel Mr. Binthong about his objection. Help him to see that the modern world has no room for racial prejudice.
2. Find a subtle way to suggest to him the advantages of living and working unitedly together regardless of ethnic background or social ranking.
3. Mind your own business.

NOTE REASONS FOR RESPONSE SELECTED. SEE BELOW FOR DISCUSSION.

1. Mr. Binthong's objection to his daughter's marriage to a Chinese may seem to reflect a prejudice to you. But he has his own cultural and traditional reasons for disapproving. Although some Thais seem unconcerned about crossing racial barriers, many still feel the two ethnic groups should remain distinct.

2. Again, Mr. Binthong's reasons for objecting to the marriage are related to personal and cultural attitudes, which are hard to change. Although he may not disagree with you openly, he is not likely to approve or your advice nor abandon his traditional ideas.

3. Yes. To discuss it further is unnecessary.

Theme 2

Who's the boss?

Helen was the daughter of an American businessman who supervised the establishment of a new business in Thailand. Her family lived in Thailand for a year. Some of the first friends she made were Naiyana and her sister Niramon.

When she first visited their home, Helen was introduced to Mr. and Mrs. Chaimongkol and to a younger brother, Damrong. Also living with the family was Mr. Chaimongkol's father. When Helen's family lived in the United States, her grandparents did not live nearby. Occasionally they visited Helen's family. Helen had an American friend whose grandmother lived with the family. The older woman was loved and respected, but was generally treated as a guest in the home.



One of the first adjustments Helen had to make to the Thai culture was the custom of grandparents living with families, which, it seemed to her, only compounded their crowded living conditions. She was even more surprised to learn that the grandfather was actually considered the family head and that his opinion was always sought in important decisions.

Helen remembered, for instance, how on one occasion she was visiting with Naiyana when the father came home from work. He was enthusiastic

about a new opportunity for a business investment which he had just learned about. He sought out his father and related the details of the venture to him. After some deliberation, the grandfather stated that he did not think the investment a wise decision. To Helen's amazement Mr. Chaimongkol accepted his father's opinion and said he wouldn't go forward with his plans.

"Maybe my dad would talk to Grandpa about an idea," Helen remarked to herself at the time, "but he sure wouldn't let Grandpa push him around. He'd make his own decision."

The patriarchal family

Mr. Chaimongkol was not being "pushed around" by his father. Although it is true that the way the members of the Chaimongkol family perceived their relationships to one another may not be typical of United States families, it is characteristic of Thai families.

The family unit in Thailand is a miniature political unit within the Thai society. The system is patriarchal in nature, with the eldest male always in charge of the unit. When he dies, the oldest female heads the unit.

The leader of the family, whether it be the grandfather, father, grandmother, or eldest son, is expected to conduct his life in a proper manner at all times and to be an example of a true follower of Buddhist principles. The system is not a democratic one. All family members are expected to abide by decisions of the ruling elder. The members of the family obey the family leader and many of their life's activities and decisions are determined by him. The loyalty and obedience of family members facilitates the smooth operation of the family unit.

Children are taught to respect their elders. It is still very common for an adult to ask permission or advice from his parents.

Time to test yourself

Siphan is a teenager. Her grandfather is a devout Buddhist. Two of her aunts are Buddhist nuns. What repercussions, if any, would you expect from Siphan's family if she were to convert to a Christian religion?

1. Because Siphan converts to Christianity, her grandfather disowns her.
2. Before joining the Christian church, Siphan talks the matter over with her grandfather, who tries to dissuade her from taking such a

step. After much pleading on her part, her grandfather grants permission.

3. The grandfather feels that his granddaughter's decision is both practical and wise. He recognizes that different generations and circumstances might require a different type of religious freedom.
4. Because Siphan's grandfather does not approve of her converting, she remains a Buddhist.

NOTE REASONS FOR RESPONSE SELECTED. SEE BELOW FOR DISCUSSION.

1. This could happen if Siphan went against her grandfather's counsel. But the likelihood of her rebelling in this way is slim. Loyalty to the family head and obedience to elders are emphasized, and the elder's opinion usually supercedes an individual's wishes. Someone who is determined to make a change such as this may join the other religion without informing the family, and then continue observing Buddhist practices along with his new religious observances.
2. It is unlikely that Siphan would continue pleading after her grandfather had already voiced his displeasure.

3. Buddhism influences every facet of the Thai way of life. Other religions are respected and tolerated, but the Thai people feel that Christianity is for Westerners and Buddhism is for Asians--both paths will lead men to the same destination. Siphan's grandfather may respect a Christian religion, but he will most likely not encourage the conversion of a family member from the traditional faith.
4. This is the most likely outcome. Or, as mentioned in #1, Siphan may join the Christian religion, but continue outward observance of Buddhist practices.

Theme 3

It doesn't matter

When Doug returned to his hotel room, he was shocked to find that his camera had been stolen.

The hotel management began an investigation of the matter, and some local police were even called in to take a look. All of them assured Doug they would do all they could to find the thief and return the camera. Although he was disappointed at his loss, he felt confident that some action was being taken.

Doug had taken for granted the concern shown by the hotel officials, who were shocked at this mistreatment of an American guest. But he was surprised at the reaction of his Thai friends. They did not seem at all upset.



"At least a camera is all that was taken," one friend commented.

"Yes. The thief might have taken some clothes or money," another added. The Thais joked about the hotel property that was also overlooked.

At first, Doug was disappointed that his friends were not as sympathetic as he'd expected them to be. But as they talked and joked together,

Doug calmed down and smiled with them at his misfortune. As their visit ended, all agreed the matter should not cause him to worry.

"Don't concern yourself about it anymore," they said. "*May pen ray*."

May pen ray

Buddhism teaches men to accept their fate and to have tolerance for their trials. A Buddhist views society and the physical environment as forces to live with. As a result, the Thai people respond to all unpleasantness by saying, "*May pen ray*" which means simply, "It doesn't matter," or "Don't worry about it."

This phrase reflects a basic attitude of the majority of the Thai people. When faced with a problem or when an error occurs, they simply laugh off the situation and disregard its consequences by saying, "*May pen ray*."

Because this way of thinking is not understood by Westerners, a visitor in the Thai culture may assume the people do not realize the seriousness of some issues. He may be frustrated when the maid works very slowly, assuming she is lazy. He will likely overreact when someone is late for an appointment or does not follow through with an agreement.

Although the smiling Thai people seem more carefree in their approach to life's problems, their culture teaches reserve in action and respect for family, religion, and government. The Thais are much more seriously concerned about the threat to their freedom which is posed by the increase of Communist influence in Indochina.

Still, life in Thailand moves at a slower and less hectic pace than in most Western countries. The Thai people generally do not worry about unpleasant happenings. Life is meant to be enjoyed. Problems should not stand in the way of this enjoyment.

Time to test yourself

You are in charge of a group assigned to complete a project in two weeks. The production of some employees is below the preestablished production goals. These employees don't seem to be putting all their effort into the task. It is true that they often stay and work on their own time, but they are constantly late for meetings and appointments and can often be found "loafing" on the job.

You have reevaluated the deadline and again found it to be realistic. It is important that you get the job done on time. What do you do?

1. Realize that you are in a different culture and that their casual attitude is typical of

the Thai culture. Don't do anything. Let them work at their own speed and hope you make the deadline.

2. Call the worst offenders into your office. Confront them with the problem and give them one more chance. If they don't comply, fire them and get some men who will work harder.
3. Meet with the employees. Explain the importance of the deadline. Let them know that you expect them to fulfill their work obligations. Determine the differences that exist between you and your workers in the way you each view the situation and try to arrive at a suitable solution.

NOTE REASONS FOR RESPONSE SELECTED. SEE BELOW FOR DISCUSSION.

1. It is true you're going to have to make some adjustments in your way of thinking. But Thais who have worked with Westerners are usually willing to affect a compromise. Don't be afraid to tactfully explain your point of view.
2. Such an abrupt action will offend the employees. Don't overreact.

3. Your American attitude will push you to work harder to "get the job done." But it is vital that you consider the Thai point of view and then try to approach the problem in a way that will show an understanding of their more casual attitude.

Theme 4

Whom can you trust?

Mike had asked the tour group to wait for him while he returned to take some more pictures of the floating market. But when he returned to the bus stop, the group had left him behind.

He knew the tour was going next to Jim Inomson's Thai House, an art and handicrafts museum. He decided to ask directions and see if he could catch up with them there.

Mike approached a distinguished-looking man who emerged from an office building carrying a briefcase. When he discovered the man could speak some English, he asked directions to the Thai House.

The man told Mike how to get to the museum and even suggested a bus he could take. But to Mike's dismay, when he got off the bus it was obvious he had been directed to the wrong place.



Mike was angry with himself that he had trusted the Thai man to understand his English. "But I thought he spoke English very well," Mike thought to himself. "If he didn't understand, why didn't he tell me? And if he did understand, why would he have given me the wrong directions?"

Saving face

Thai people are proud. In the presence of strangers or friends, and particularly among foreigners, they do not like to admit that they do not know something or do not understand something. They dislike being put in a situation in which they lose "face."

"Face" may be defined as the individual's morale, his self-esteem, and his general good feeling. It is important that his face or his reputation be preserved at all times. This places great emphasis on preserving the good feelings of everyone at all costs. Because of this emphasis on feelings and appearance, it is often more important that things appear well than that they ac-

tually be well. In other words, it may be considered a severe breach of courtesy to upset a person's feelings.

If a visitor asks a Thai directions and the Thai does not understand the question or does not know where the place is, he will probably give some response, even though the directions will not be right. He may simply shake his head to show that he does not speak English. In this way, the Thai avoids losing face with the visitor by not having to admit his ignorance, and he preserves the other man's face by not disappointing him.

The Thai people are embarrassed when placed in a situation in which their name, honor, or credibility as an individual is questioned. Visitors should use simple English vocabulary and speak slowly so that confusion and awkward situations are avoided. Do not force a person to make an appointment with you or to take one side of an argument. The American practice of attempting to influence people through pressure is not a Thai pattern.

In any country, diplomacy is the key to all human relationships. Simple respect for the age and dignity of a man should always take precedence. If a visitor to the Thai culture will treat those he meets with genuine kindness and respect, it is unlikely that anyone will be offended.

Buddhist doctrine teaches moderation and passive acceptance in life. Overindulgence and uncontrolled habits or ways of living can only lead to unhappiness. The Thai people have a great respect for the refined and well-mannered gentleman. They, themselves, are traditionally a very reserved and polite people--proper etiquette in social circles is extremely important. They are impressed when foreign visitors learn and practice Thai customs, especially as they reflect the qualities of a refined person.



Time to test yourself

Bruce is in charge of a task force at work. He wants to organize the others who will assist him. He visits with each one to see if they can attend an orientation meeting after work. Prawit seems reluctant and mentions he isn't sure if he can make it or not.

"Now, Prawit, this is very important. Will you be at the meeting?" Bruce asks. Prawit smiles and says that he will come if he can.

"Come, Prawit," Bruce persists. "You're a bachelor and surely can spare a few minutes. What are you doing after work that's so important?"

Prawit is silent. What can Bruce do to be

sure Prawit attends the meeting?

1. Continue to apply a little more pressure. "Don't tell me you can't change your plans. This is really important. You'll be there, won't you?"
2. Let Prawit know his evasiveness annoys you. Perhaps he doesn't see that his stubbornness is upsetting you.
3. Calmly explain the purpose and importance of the meeting. Urge him to attend, but if he resists, don't force the issue.
4. Do nothing to press him further. Maybe Bruce should consider someone else for the job.

NOTE REASONS FOR RESPONSE SELECTED. SEE BELOW FOR DISCUSSION.

1. Pushing someone into a corner is sure to mean that both individuals will lose face-- Bruce because of his aggressiveness, and Prawit because his attempt to gracefully evade the situation has been thwarted.
2. The Thais would rather negotiate a settlement than become upset or angry. Human relationships seem more important to them than winning. Expressing your anger may lead Prawit to cooperate with your plan, but again both individuals lose face.
3. A wise tactic. If Prawit is trying to find a graceful way out, let him take it, rather than forcing the issue with him.
4. While Bruce is not getting the cooperation he wants at the moment, to overlook Prawit completely would cast doubt on his abilities. Perhaps another meeting could be arranged in order to give him another opportunity to participate.

Other cultural themes

Buddhism

Ninety-four percent of the people of Thailand are Buddhists. Buddhism is the central force in the customs and daily life of the nation. Monks (*phrae*) are the most respected persons in the country and monasteries (*wat*) are considered sacred places. In many spirit houses throughout the country, people worship local spiritual deities.

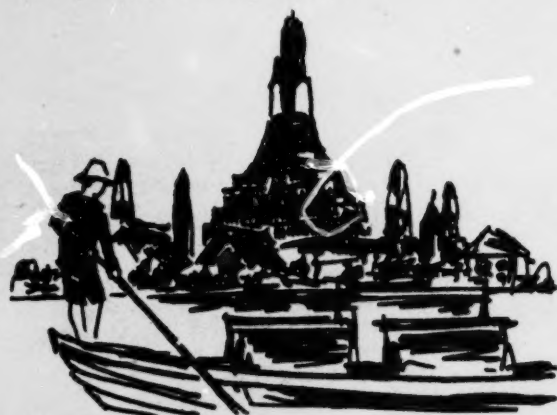
By law the king must be a Buddhist and be the example of a good follower of Buddhism. All young men are expected to become monks for a three-month period. Government ceremonies are based on traditional Buddhist concepts and there are numerous Buddhist festivals and holidays throughout the year.

When visiting a *wat*, one should wear neat, clean clothes. Visitors have unknowingly offended Thai people by entering a *wat* barefoot or without a shirt. It is also a Thai custom to remove one's shoes before entering a temple (*baod*).

Other important sacred laws and Buddhist customs should be respected. Women must not touch a monk or hand things directly to him. The rear seats of public buses are reserved for monks. Buddha images must be highly respected regardless of size. If you purchase a small Buddha image, do not put it in the pocket of your pants, since such contact with the lower part of the body defiles the image.

Most young people still honor the ways of their ancestors and follow the teachings of Buddhism. But an increasing number are beginning to reject the traditional Thai ways of living and thinking as taught by their religion.

It is estimated that less than 10 percent of the Thai people are Christians, although many of the Protestant sects have worked in Thailand for many years. Numerous schools and hospitals have been built by Christian religions in Bangkok and other parts of the country.



All religions are respected and tolerated by the Thai people. However, they feel that Christianity is for Westerners and Buddhism is for Asians, and that adherents of both will eventually arrive in "heaven." It is common to see the king present at the dedication of a new Christian church or greeting religious leaders from various faiths at his palace.

The Thai people enjoy talking about religion and religious philosophy. But critical arguing over doctrinal concepts should be avoided.



Sanuk

Sanuk means fun, entertainment, or amusement and it is another central theme of the Thai way of life. In their daily activities, the Thai people look for ways to make life enjoyable. Their leisure time is dear to them and they like to engage in many forms of leisure activities by themselves, in groups, or with their families. Life without some form of fun is a dreary life for a Thai.

Almost everyone in Thailand, from the youngest child to the grandparents, takes some time out of his daily life for *sanuk*. *Sanuk* can be a simple child's game, or a leisurely chat with an old friend while eating some Thai pineapple.

Some ambitious younger businessmen work hard to get ahead in life, and the Chinese in Thailand are more concerned with making a profit and developing their businesses than with constant enjoyment. But usually fun in Thailand comes before more serious responsibilities.

Recreation and entertainment plays a major part in the lives of the Thai people. Everywhere people can be seen playing games, going to the movies, watching television, relaxing and talking to friends. Since Sunday has no religious significance in Buddhism, it is considered a day of fun and relaxation. Movie houses are full and

people shop at the weekend market and go to the park to fly kites.

Success

Traditionally, the Thai concept of success was centered in Buddhism. A successful Thai was seen by his contemporaries as being loyal to his king and country and to the concepts of his religion. He lived Buddhist principles daily, donated food and necessities to Buddhist monks, and donated funds for the building and upkeep of temples.

More recently, however, as Thailand has become more Westernized and modernized, education and material wealth are becoming major determinants of success. Education is a key to a good job, which in turn insures access to land-holdings, a modern house, and material goods such as automobiles, electrical appliances, fine clothing, etc. The modern Thai is looking for success in terms of financial security and modernization concepts which will develop Thailand as an economic power.

When is a wave goodbye a wave goodbye?

As you prepare for your experience in Thailand, you may think that you can get along with hand signals and other gestures until you learn to speak the new language. Unfortunately, there are few facial expressions that mean exactly the same thing throughout the whole world. In some countries there are similarities to gestures and expressions used by Americans. However, most likely you will find your natural communication cues being misunderstood.

Of course, Thais are very tolerant of the ignorant mistakes of foreigners. Still, you are more likely to be accepted by the people of Thailand if you conform to some of their more important customs. Effective intercultural verbal and nonverbal communication includes the following:

Greetings

Men and women generally do not shake hands except in the more westernized social groups. The traditional and most common Thai greeting is called *wai* (pronounced "why"). The hands are placed together in a prayer position at the chest or in front of the face, and the head is bowed. The higher the hands are placed, the more respect is being shown. However, only in formal ceremonies are the hands raised higher than the face. Among adults, failure to return a *wai* greeting is like refusing a handshake in the West. This gesture is also used to indicate thanks and apology.

Visiting

When entering a home, guests should remove their shoes. This keeps the home clean, especially during the rainy season. It also shows humility and respect to the inhabitants of the home. Some Thais, however, will insist that foreign visitors leave their shoes on, since they realize it is not a Western custom to remove them.

Guests should not step on door sills. Thais believe that a deity resides in the doorsill and touching the deity's dwelling place with the foot

would be offensive. It is courteous to sit on the floor if your host does so.

Men remove their hats when entering a home, temple, a sacred building such as the king's palace, or a government building.

Talk to the people about their country and about yourself. The Thai people are interested in talking to visitors and generally are not hesitant about talking to strangers even on public streets.

Always address your comments to the older adults, since they are the leaders in the family and have the greatest influence in society.

You may find that some Thais will ask about financial matters. It is not uncommon to be asked the price of something you bought. On occasion you may be asked how much you pay for your house or apartment, how much your car costs, or how much you or your spouse earn. You should not feel compelled to give precise answers if you do not wish to.

Eating

As soon as the guest arrives he will be





offered a drink--a soft drink, beer, whiskey, or water. Probably the guest will not be asked what he prefers to drink.

When invited to eat at a Thai home, the guest should make an effort to eat as much as he can since this indicates that he is enjoying himself. If a particular food appears unappetizing, it is not impolite to avoid eating it. However, one should not voice his displeasure with any food.

Usually, many kinds of food are placed in the center of the table and each person will help himself. The Western custom of passing food from guest to guest is not followed in Thailand.

A spoon and fork are used for eating. A knife is unnecessary since meat is usually chopped in small pieces. The Chinese minority use chopsticks for eating. Except at restaurants, one seldom finds napkins or placemats at the dinner table.

Thais normally eat one kind of food with rice at a time. When they have had all they want of that dish, they will try another. They do not mix many different kinds of food together on their plates.

A Thai host will refill the guest's plate when it is empty. Most Thai people leave a little food on the plate when they are finished eating. Sincere compliments are appreciated.

Usually, eating in a smaller village means sitting on mats or on the floor around the food. Utensils are seldom used. The villagers of north and northeastern Thailand eat sticky rice which is dipped into a variety of sauces. The visitor can observe the other guests rolling their rice into a small ball to avoid dropping rice into the sauces, and follow their lead. Sometimes spoons are used for soup and other dishes, but these are not conventional Western spoons. One usually dips his spoon into a common bowl and eats in this fashion. In most cases individual servings are not provided.

In Thai restaurants tips are usually unnecessary, but sometimes a 5 to 10 percent tip is given to waitresses or bellboys if change is brought on a tray.

Gifts

Don't be surprised if a gift given to a Thai is not opened in your presence. The normal Thai way to express appreciation for a gift is a verbal thank you at the time the present is received.

Gestures

A person's head is traditionally considered sacred. It is not touched by others, nor are objects passed over someone's head. The feet are a less-esteemed part of the body. People avoid stamping them, touching people with them, or using them to move or point at objects. It is in poor taste to sit cross-legged with the toe or sole of the foot pointed at someone or sit with the legs elevated and pointed toward a person. Many Thai men cross their legs at the ankle and point the toes toward the floor.

Though this may seem a small matter of etiquette to a foreign visitor, it is an extremely important social issue in Thailand. Foreign visitors should make every effort to avoid violating these Thai customs.

Placing one's arm over the back of the chair in which another person is sitting is considered offensive. Also, the typical American "slap on the back" would be out of place in public.

Women should never touch a Buddhist monk or hand an object directly to him.

Affection between males and females is not commonly shown in public. It is considered especially improper to kiss or hug in public. Because of Western influence, the acceptable customs are gradually changing. One can see young Thai couples holding hands in public, but one is not likely to see public displays of affection beyond this gesture.

It is not uncommon for Thais to hold hands



with good friends of the same sex. This is particularly true of men. Such a gesture is entirely acceptable and carries no unfavorable connotations as in the United States.

Thailand is called the "Land of Smiles" because the Thai people are very quick to smile. But sometimes they smile in situations that, according to Western culture, would not call for a smile. They will smile when they are embarrassed or if they have made a mistake. For example, a restaurant employee may smile or laugh lightly when you tell him that he has not brought you the correct order. If you are speaking English and a Thai store owner cannot completely understand you, he may smile to cover his embarrassment.

Use of names

People are addressed by their first names. The last name is used in formal situations or on official records. It is considered impolite by some Thais to use a person's last name. The Thai people usually have a nickname, but it is only used by close friends and family members. Although they are infrequently used, it is not impolite to ask someone his last name.

As a result of this practice, Thais may sometimes refer to a Westerner as "Mr. Bill" or "Mr. John."

General courtesies

- * Most Thais do not appreciate loud or boisterous behavior except on special occasions. Do not talk in a loud tone of voice in public. Do not behave in such a way as to draw attention to yourself.
- * Bargaining in Thailand is a way of life, but to get angry about anything is very embarrassing to the Thais.
- * Have a sense of humor. Laughter and a pleasant, smiling attitude are highly regarded by the Thai



people.

* Thai humor differs from Western humor in many ways, and unless one is fluent in the Thai language it is unlikely that he will be able to appreciate Thai humor. This is not a serious problem, but recognize that your humor may not be appreciated either. It is best to avoid all types of sarcasm.

* Speak as much Thai as possible. Especially learn the traditional greetings. Even the little Thai you speak will be appreciated. The Thais are also very interested in learning English.

* It is considered very improper to throw any object toward or over another person. When passing an object, hand it directly to the other person. When a friend or person of equal or lower status is concerned, the Thais will sometimes throw an object after first excusing themselves.

* Do not attend a sacred ceremony such as a wedding, cremation, or birthday celebration unless you have been formally invited to attend.

* When taking pictures of Buddhist statues, Buddhist monks, or any person, be sure to ask permission first.

Breaking language barriers

If you cannot speak another person's language, you are terribly handicapped in communicating with him. Because language is the most important communication tool in any society, it is possibly the area of your greatest security. You will come into the whole new world of Thailand where you may not know the Thai language at all. You will be stripped of your primary means of interacting with others.

Your purpose and length of stay in Thailand will determine the language proficiency you will need or desire. Language training is available through schools, self-study, and various language booklets written especially for travelers.

Thai is a tonal language derived in part from Indian dialects which developed in the Khmer Kingdom a thousand years ago. The alphabet, similar to Cambodian and Laos, was originally derived from Sanskrit and Pali.

The inflection given a word can change its meaning. For example, the word *ma* can mean come, horse, or dog, depending on how it is inflected.

English is understood among educated people in Bangkok and other big cities, and by people involved in the tourist industry. In the north, a dialect akin to Laotian is spoken. Many other Thais speak local dialects, though standard Thai is taught and understood throughout the country.

If you plan to stay for even a short time in Thailand, it would be advisable to obtain a Thai conversation booklet. In case you find yourself with no other materials, this "survival" section can assist you in communicating in Thai. The following are simple words and phrases to master.

ENGLISH

Hello (said by women)
Hello (said by men)
Goodbye (said to women)
Goodbye (said to men)
How are you?
Fine, thanks.
I am sorry.
Have you eaten?
delicious
spicy
I'm full.
How many?
How much?
expensive
cheap
I don't want it.
Where is _____?

THAI

sawadi kha
sawadi khrap
la gon kha
la gon khrap
s'bai dee roo?
s'bai dee, kop kun.
kha thod.
ghin cow mai?
aroi
pet
im lao
ghe baht
tao rai
paeng
tuke
my ow
_____ yu thi nai?

Sign language

An excellent way to orient yourself in a new culture is to become familiar with the many signs you see. Until you learn to ask the location of the nearest restroom, it might be helpful at least to be able to recognize the sign. It also helps you to find clean air and to stay away from dangerous areas. Even if you can't speak the language,

you can walk around looking like you know where you are going and what you are doing.

Most of the following signs will be written in both English and Thai. Many street and instructional signs use international characters.

ENGLISH

Restroom

Men

Women

Do not enter

Entrance

Exit

Danger

No smoking

Bus Stop

Beauty Salon

Barber Shop

Bank

Post Office

Train Station

Bus Station

THAI

ห้องสุขา

ชาย (สุภาพบุรุษ)

หญิง (สุภาพสตรี)

ห้ามเข้า

ทางเข้า

ทางออก

อันตราย

ห้ามสูบบุหรี่

ที่จอดรถประจำทาง

ห้องเสริมสวย

ร้านตัดผม

ธนาคาร

ที่ทำการไปรษณีย์

สถานีรถไฟ

สถานีรถโดยสารประจำทาง

Plaid pants, sport shirt, hat, camera, and shades

You are dressed in your "travel duds" and plan to buy some beautiful Thai silk before you fly home. Sound exciting? It should be. However, if you are not familiar with Thai shopping procedures, you may end up paying a great deal more than is necessary for the silk.

There are differences in just about every aspect of Thai life. A glance through this section will help you plan your time and avoid harassment by "the little things."



Monetary system

The principal Thai currency is the *baht*. It is also called the *tiat*. The exchange rate is about 20 *baht* (฿20) to the U.S. dollar. 1 *baht* = 100 *satang*. Thai currency is very colorful.

A visitor should use only Thai money to make purchases, since it is illegal for Thai merchants to take United States currency instead of Thai *baht*.

Shopping

Shop hours are 8:30 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. Shops are open on Saturdays and Sundays, and some stay open until 10:00 p.m.

Foreigners must bargain vigorously for most purchases, except for books and commodities in all department stores. The first price may range anywhere from 120% to 300% of the fair price. Be sure to approach bargaining with a sense of humor; an antagonistic attitude will not help lower the price.

Bangkok is called the "Venice of the East" because one-fifth of the population lives on the many canals throughout the city. An interesting feature in Bangkok is the "floating market," where vegetables, fruits, and other foods are sold from small boats.

Diet

In Thailand, three meals are eaten each day. Rice, either long grain or glutinous (sticky), is usually the main part of every meal, and it is complemented by vegetables, fruits, curry, and a variety of meats, including fish, chicken, beef, and pork.

The Thai diet is usually quite spicy. A popular hot sauce is made of green or dry pepper, onions, garlic, and lime juice. Often a salty shrimp is served with this sauce.

Many unique fruits are eaten for dessert. A custard-like dessert is often bought at a store.

If you are prone to stomach problems, avoid drinking unboiled water.

Public transportation

Air Siam links Bangkok to Hong Kong, Tokyo, Fukuoka, Honolulu, and Los Angeles. Thai International Airway travels to New York via Europe.

Thailand boasts an excellent train service to all parts of the country. Schedule and fares are listed in a small pamphlet available at most train stations. On Monday, Wednesday, and Friday an express train from Bangkok connects with the International Railway of Malaysia and Singapore.

Public buses are generally more crowded and less expensive than trains. Seats can be purchased in advance. There are three main terminals in Bangkok. In addition to public buses, various private companies have comfortable air-conditioned coaches making trips to every major city.

Every town and city outside of Bangkok has an abundance of *samlors* (three-wheeled cabs) which provide inexpensive transportation. *Song-taos* (Datsun minibuses with two bench seats in the rear cab) operate on the outskirts of most towns. These *song-taos* do not always follow a fixed route--they may go in the direction of the first passenger, then stop anywhere along the way to pick up or drop off other passengers.

The bus system offers the best transportation in Bangkok. If a visitor plans to drive in Bangkok, he should be aware that traffic can be very heavy and move very slowly, so plenty of time should be allowed to reach a destination. Many of the common driving courtesies practiced in the United States are not practiced in Bangkok, so the drivers should be patient, remain calm, and

drive defensively.

When using a *samlor* or taxi, be sure to bargain and set the price before getting in. Try to avoid using transportation during the rush hours from 7 to 9 a.m. and from 4 to 6:30 p.m. Buses stop running at about 11:30 p.m.

Domestic help

For many foreigners, living in Thailand will be their first experience working with domestic servants hired to assist in the home. When dealing with domestic help, the following guidelines should be noted:

1. Most of those who will work as maids have had little formal education. They probably have not been exposed to the modern items common in Western household, such as electricity, running water, and electrical appliances.
2. A servant's English will not contain a large vocabulary. It is best not to make lengthy explanations, but rather to issue clear, concise instructions or demonstrations.
3. Many Thais who are not familiar with Western culture may appear to be frequently tardy or seem to work very slowly. It is easy to conclude that they are lazy, but this is likely not the case at all. They are just operating at their own pace, and unless there are some overriding reasons why you think they should change, it is suggested that you try to adapt a little to their concept of "time" before trying to change them.
4. Thais, as a general rule, are very clean. If your domestic help does not meet your standards of cleanliness, a simple explanation of their shortcomings will normally be adequate.
5. It is suggested that, while always being friendly, you try to maintain a somewhat more distant employer-employee relationship. It is best to avoid having them eat with the family, go to a movie with the family,



or become involved in personal discussions of family problems.

6. Most visitors to Thailand have found their servants to be very honest. It is suggested that you be careful with cash and other valuables until your servants identify with you; then they can be depended on to be very loyal and trustworthy.

Festivals & holidays

Thai Buddhist festivals are celebrated according to the Lunar Calendar. One of the most important festivals in Thailand is *Visakha Puja*, commemorating Buddha's birth, enlightenment, and passing into Nirvana. Processions and ceremonies involving Buddhist monks can be seen in late May at the temples.

Songkran, the Water Festival, is also the traditional Thai New Year celebration. It is a festival held in April, featuring elaborate processions in the streets of Chiang Mai and the country-wide traditional custom of sprinkling perfumed water on the hands of monks, elders, and Buddha statues.

Another special festival is *Loy Krathong*, celebrated on the full-moon night of the twelfth lunar month. Thai people use banana leaves to construct small vessels in the shape of lotus leaves, which are decorated with candles and flowers in thanksgiving for the waters of the season. The people make a wish as they set these boats afloat on the rivers of Bangkok and Chiang Mai. It is believed that if the boat sails out of sight without sinking the wish will come true.

Queen's Day (August 12), Chulalongkorn Day (October 23), Birthday of the King (December 5), and New Years (December 31 to January 1) are also celebrated.

Clothing

The Thai people prefer to wear conservative and comfortable clothing. They wear Western clothing styles. Although the Thais tend to be uncomfortable when they are around smart dressers,

visitors should never dress in a sloppy manner. Everyday dress should always be fairly conservative, but comfortable. Clothing should be clean and ironed.

The women often wear long skirts or dresses for more important occasions. While pants have become very popular with Thai women, they are still not considered appropriate when visiting a temple, where Sunday dress is expected. Even when playing sports the Thais usually dress in uniforms.

At weddings, the color white is reserved for the bride. Black and purple should also be avoided when attending weddings, since black signifies sorrow and is usually worn to funerals, and purple signifies that the wearer is a widow still in mourning for her husband.

For funerals women wear black dresses, preferably with sleeves, and men wear dark suits, black neckties, and white shirts, with a black armband on the outside sleeve.

Religious ceremonies

Many religious holidays are celebrated throughout the year. As a general rule, the Thais welcome attendance by foreign visitors at the various ceremonies.

When attending any ceremony, pattern your behavior after that of the Thais. If in doubt as to what is expected, it is not impolite to ask for guidance. Women should be particularly reserved when participating in ceremonies.

Marriage

If the foreign visitor is a good friend of a Thai, he may be invited to a wedding. An especially intimate friend may be invited to all of the ceremonies connected with the marriage.

At the morning blessing of the marriage, the monks chant at the home of the bride. The visitor need only sit in a prayerful position and listen to the chanting.

The pouring of the lustral water over the hands of the bride and groom is usually attended by the family. The afternoon ceremony of pouring



water for a larger group is usually held at a hotel. A guest should wait his turn to pour a little of the water in the jar over the hands of the couple and express his wishes for their happiness.

If there is no reception, the guest can return home. An evening reception where cocktails or dinner may be served is common in Bangkok and is quite similar to Western wedding receptions. The men wear suits and women usually wear long dresses. Some guests bring presents, but most give money in a sealed envelope.

If the couple can't afford to go to Hong Kong or Japan for a honeymoon, they may see the sights in Bangkok and visit the seashore.

Funeral customs

It is not necessary to receive an invitation to go to a funeral. However, it is not customary to attend the cremation of the corpse, which takes place some time after the funeral, unless one has received a formal invitation.

Dress for Thai funerals should include black for women and dark suits for men. It is a common practice to send flowers, usually in the form of a funeral wreath. If the deceased was a close friend, a small monetary offering to help defray the costs of the funeral is considered appropriate. This offering, if made, is placed in an envelope and very discreetly passed to one of the family members.

When a guest arrives at the place of the funeral, he offers condolences to the members of the family and then pays final respects to the body of the deceased. This is done by lighting one joss stick, holding it in a *wai* position, and with the head slightly bowed, asking for forgiveness for any wrongs or injustices that one may have inflicted on the deceased during his lifetime.

Praying for the dead publicly may last for seven days after death, then the body is taken away and prepared for cremation. If death was caused by illness, common practice permits keeping the body for as many as 100 days and up to as much



as several years before it is cremated. If, however, death resulted from an accident, the corpse will usually be cremated much sooner.

Thai funerals usually last for several hours in the evening, but it is not necessary for the guests to remain until the ceremony has been completed. Departure during the ceremony is acceptable as long as one does not leave during the oral praying of one of the monks.

Parties

When a party is hosted by Westerners, it is not unusual for only the husband to attend, although his wife may also have been invited. Some Thai women do not enjoy socializing with foreigners because they feel uncomfortable about not being able to speak English and fear that they will be looked down upon.

The American host should not be upset if he receives no reply to an invitation marked "RSVP" or discovers that many of the invited guests have not come. If it is essential to know who will attend, it is accepted practice to call after the invitation has been sent.



Thai men seem to enjoy all-male parties more than those where couples are invited because they feel that Thai women are so polite and reserved that the men cannot behave as freely as they would like. They also feel that business and politics, favorite topics of conversation, are strictly male concerns.

The beginning

You are now at the real beginning of your cultural experience in Thailand. You will find that the old cliché "Experience is the best teacher" will be true.

You will undoubtedly learn much more from your own experiences, successes, and failures than from this Learning Aid. However, this information gives you some principles to get you started effectively communicating with the people of Thailand. Review this Learning Aid as needed. Only as you experience similar situations will you really begin to understand what you have learned.

While in Thailand you will be tempted at times to wonder about the "strange foreigners" around you. At these times, it would be good to remind yourself that the Thais are just reflecting their culture and that, in fact, you are

the "foreigner," the one who is different.

The concepts presented in this booklet will not always apply in every situation or in every part of the country. It does provide some of the most basic facts about Thai behavior and some of the premises upon which Thai life is based.

You are probably going to make some mistakes. But don't let this worry you excessively. The Thais have a great sense of humor and will understand that you are new to their culture. Because of this they will accept more mistakes from you than they would from someone of their own culture. However, don't let this goodwill on their part make your efforts any less than wholehearted. As you try to speak their language, both linguistically and culturally, you will be surprised at the new dimensions of your experience.

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